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From Coast to Coast:

or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Trip Across Africa in
His Electric "Boomerang."

By "NONAME."



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From Coast to Coast;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Trip Across Africa in His Electric "Boomerang."

A THRILLING STORY OF WILD EXPLORATION.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Under the Equator From Ecuador to Borneo," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s 'Sky Scraper,'" "Under the Yellow Sea," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Prairie Whirlwind; or, The Mystery of the Hidden Canyon," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROPOSED TRIP.

FRANK READE, JR., the famous young inventor had just finished his new Electric Boomerang, the most wonderful of all his recent trials in the inventive line, and had sent down to New York city for his friend Gerard Benton to come up and see it.

Benton, the well known young newspaper man and African explorer, received this invitation with delight.

"Heigho!" he cried in his exuberance of feeling, "if Frank has really succeeded in perfecting the Boomerang, I have all hopes of traversing the African continent yet."

So he hastily picked up his effects and bought a ticket for Readestown.

Arrived in the smart little town he proceeded at once to the machine shops of Frank Reade, Jr.

As it chanced the young inventor was at home and gladly welcomed his visitor.

"Delighted to see you, Gerard!" said Frank warmly. "You came promptly."

"I could not wait for the cars to get here!" declared the young traveler. "So your Boomerang is completed, Frank?"

"Yes."

"I am consumed with curiosity to see it!"

"And you shall!"

Frank touched an electric button which rang a bell in the inner yard.

Very quickly a door opened and a comical negro, black as a coal, bounced into the room.

He ducked his head and cried:

"A'right, Marse Frank. Wha' am it I kin do fo' yo'?"

"Where is Barney?" asked the young inventor.

"Begorra, he's here, sor," came a rich brogue from beyond the door, and into the room tumbled a block of an Irishman, with fiery red hair and a mug fit for a chromo.

Frank and Gerard laughed.

"So these are Barney and Pomp?" cried the explorer. "I have heard of them."

Frank introduced Barney and Pomp to Gerard, saying:

"Where one is found, be sure the other is not far away. I could hardly spare either."

"I have heard their praises sung before," said Gerard. "I am assured they are faithful fellows."

At which Pomp did a little breakdown and Barney turned a hand-spring.

"We'se gwine to stick by Marse Frank forebber, sah," declared Pomp. "He am a bery fine gemmen."

"Begorra, the same here," averred Barney.

"Well!" said Frank, bluntly, "here is a command I want you to obey at once!"

"A'right, sah!"

"Name it, sor!"

"I want to show the Boomerang to my friend, Mr. Benton. Haul it out into the yard, and have it all ready for inspection!"

The two servitors vanished. As they disappeared Benton laughed heartily.

"Truly, Frank!" he said, "you could ill dispense with those chaps!"

"That is true!" agreed Frank, "and yet they are at times a great trial to me!"

"A trial?"

"Yes, they are as full of fun as a nut is of meat, and constantly playing pranks upon one another. Why, not two days ago, Barney gave Pomp a drink of drugged whisky, and then when he was asleep, painted his face with cosmetics so cleverly that the next time Pomp looked in the glass he nearly fainted, and really believed that his face had turned white, until he came to wash it."

Benton laughed heartily at this.

"So they are practical jokers."

"Of the most inveterate kind."

"Ha, ha! Yet they are jolly!"

"Indeed, yes; at times too much so. By the way, are you as enthusiastic as ever over Africa?"

"I am!" replied Gerard, eagerly. "And—how dare I ask it?"

"What?"

The young explorer looked at Frank appealingly.

"If I could only induce you to make that trip."

"Which trip?"

Their eyes met.

"Across Africa!" said Gerard, spasmodically. "I will broach it anyway. You cannot do more than refuse me."

"I have got to take a trip somewhere with the Boomerang," said Frank. "I want to seek an unexplored land where I can find wild adventure."

Benton gave a cry of joy.

"What better can you do then?" he asked. "I will promise you all the wild adventure any reasonable man can ask for."

Frank laughed.

"Set all your fears aside!" he said. "What do you think I sent for you to come to Readestown for?"

"Oh, then you really mean it!" cried the explorer, wildly. "You will go?"

"Yes!"

Gerard danced with joy. He fairly embraced Frank.

"What a great thing it will be for science!" he cried, wildly. "Really, Frank, you have no idea what a great benefit you are doing the world!"

"I am glad if that is so!" said Frank, "but are you ready to go?"

"More than ready, and you—"

"I shall be in three days' time. In fact, if you had given up the idea of this trip I should have gone just the same."

"You would?"

"Yes, I have already negotiated with the captain of the Southern Star, a trading steamer bound for the Gold Coast. He is to take the

Boomerang aboard his steamer and land us safely in St. Paul de Loanda."

"Good!" cried Benton, joyfully. "Oh, I long to get there!"

"What route were you most desirous of taking?"

"Straight—from coast to coast, coming out at Zanzibar. This will be through the Congo Free State, across Lake Tanganyika and Ukonongo to the sea. Oh, we shall see many wild sights!"

"How soon can you be ready to go?" asked Frank, brusquely.

"I am ready now!"

"Good! The Southern Star will leave her dock in the North River next Thursday, from New York for St. Paul de Loanda. You will be on board?"

"I will!"

"Then the matter is settled."

"But—"

"What?"

"Is the Southern Star a large enough steamer to take the machine bodily into the hold?"

"Oh, no! I have provided for that. The Boomerang is easily taken apart in sections and stowed away in small compass. It can be put together again at St. Paul, and the Southern Star will take my workmen around the Cape to Zanzibar and wait for our coming there!"

Gerard was satisfied.

"That is capital," he said, "and now I itch for the final day to come."

At this moment a bell jingled in the office. Frank made a gesture and opened the door.

"Come," he said, "the Boomerang is ready for inspection."

"And I am ready to inspect it!" cried Gerard. "Hello! What a beauty!"

Then he stood speechless in the machine shop yard. The Boomerang was before his eyes.

There she stood in the middle of the yard. Barney was in the pilot-house and Pomp was by the gangway.

Quite a number of the workmen were gathered at the gate to see the machine for the first time out of doors.

It is a hard task to adequately describe the Boomerang. The artist can do much better than the author whose pen description cannot hope to equal that of the engraver.

In a meagre way we will say that the Boomerang consisted of a large, boat-shaped structure of finely rolled steel; her hull was shapely and well hung upon substantial running gear. The wheels were four in number upon patent axles which were so constructed as to obey the steering wheel in the pilot-house.

These wheels were provided with rubber tires and were driven by a propelling rod operated by an electrical engine in the body of the vehicle.

There were two decks or floors. The lower one was made light by three plate glass windows upon each side.

The upper deck was protected by a hand rail which ran completely around the vehicle. Above this deck rose an oblong structure of finest and bullet proof wire netting with a dome-shaped roof.

Behind this netting one could remain and see plainly in all directions and at the same time be safe from the bullets of a foe or the claws of wild animals.

There were loopholes in this structure for the purpose of firing through.

Just forward of this was an elevated platform upon which was mounted an electric gun.

This gun was Frank Reade, Jr.'s own invention and a very peculiar weapon.

It was light and made of thin steel. The propulsive force was pneumatic, the projectile being a shell of dynamite very explosive upon impact.

Forward of the pilot-house, with its plate-glass windows, was a small deck protected by a handrail.

This is a brief and incomplete description of the exterior of the machine.

The interior was a marvel beyond description.

The lower deck was occupied by a main cabin luxuriously furnished, a number of small yet cozy state-rooms, the galley for Pomp's cooking and a magazine for ammunition, as well as a store-room for supplies.

Of course, all of these compartments were small, but, nevertheless, they were adequate.

The main cabin was elegantly furnished and upholstered. In short, the Boomerang was a little palace on wheels, and in every way fitted up for such an expedition as the travelers now proposed to take.

CHAPTER II. IN AFRICA.

So it was settled that the Boomerang was to start upon its African trip from St. Paul de Loanda.

This was the important seaport town of Lower Guinea and once famous for its great slave trade.

One needed to go not many miles back into the interior to meet with all the perils of the African wilderness.

The Boomerang was taken carefully apart and stowed away aboard a special train bound for New York.

The Southern Star, Captain Porter, was all in readiness in the North river. In due course the famous invention was stowed safely in the big steamer's hold.

Then the travelers left for New York upon the fast express.

Quite a large crowd waited upon Frank Reade, Jr., at the dock to bid him Godspeed in his journey.

Then the Southern Star was allowed to slip out into the stream and the great journey was begun.

The spirits of none were higher than Gerard Benton's.

The young explorer was just in his element.

"Why, I am going back to my beloved Africa!" he said. "And this time I shall go equipped for a successful invasion of those regions to which I dared not penetrate before."

"Then you enjoy exploration?" asked Frank.

"Enjoy it? Why, it is the sum total of my existence. It is as much my nature as to breathe. And I cannot give it up!"

Barney and Pomp were also in a happy frame of mind.

Nothing suited them better than to be off on a voyage of discovery. The more exciting the adventures they could encounter the better they liked it.

The voyage proved a pretty stiff one.

Gales and hurricanes galore were encountered. It seemed as if every foot of progress was battled against head winds.

At one time the travelers began to fear that they really would not reach the African coast.

The Southern Star was one of the stanchest of vessels, and Captain Porter, a good skipper, or they assuredly would have succumbed to the awful seas.

But at last they struck the Equator and entered the Gulf of Guinea.

Here the smoothest of seas were encountered, and the spirits of all at once arose.

The distant coast of the African continent was now plainly seen. It gave all a thrill.

The steamer had suffered some little damage during her hard struggle against wind and wave.

But this was finally, to a certain extent, repaired. Then the stanch vessel stood southward along the coast.

One fine morning she dropped into the harbor of St. Paul de Loanda.

"Here we are!" cried Benton.

"Our voyage is ended," declared Frank, "and our journey has begun!"

This was true.

The incidents of that journey the little party were destined never to forget during the rest of their lives.

The Southern Star anchored, and very soon lighters were alongside.

The different sections of the Boomerang were placed aboard these, and finally landed at the wharf.

Here the workmen whom Frank had brought with him proceeded to put the machine together.

This attracted quite a large throng of the native residents, and the governor of the little town paid the wharf a visit.

He was a genial personage, and made no demur to the landing of the exploring party.

Indeed, he extended a cordial invitation to Frank to visit him at his house.

But the young inventor was obliged to decline this politely, and proceeded to put the Boomerang together as rapidly as possible.

To put the machine together and put all the supplies aboard consumed all of two days.

But the great task was finally concluded, and all was in readiness for the start.

Captain Porter and his crew bade farewell to the travelers, and then the Southern Star started away for the Cape of Good Hope and Zanzibar.

The travelers were left alone upon the wild African coast. The perils of their project now began to assume gigantic shape.

Yet not one of them would have turned back.

Through jungle and forest, across swamp and stream, over mountain and through valley they must make their way ever eastward, from coast to coast.

There were to be apprehended encounters with lions, elephants, tigers, deadly reptiles and battles with savage people.

Also there was to be feared and avoided, if possible, the deadly jungle fever, the malaria of the swamps and the contagious diseases peculiar to an ultra-tropical climate.

But all these things had been considered, though it was to be confessed that their proximity caused them to assume more gigantic proportions.

However, Frank called all aboard the Boomerang and stepped into the pilot-house.

Barney went into the engine room. The dynamos were charged to their fullest extent.

Frank pressed a little button which rang a bell in the engine room. Barney turned on the current.

The machinery began to buzz. Frank placed a hand on the motor lever and turned it.

At once the Boomerang rolled forward as noiselessly and as softly as a Pullman car on the steel rails.

Down the principal street of the little town the electric car ran at increased speed.

It is needless to say that this created more or less of a sensation in the town.

The people crowded from houses and stores to see the great wonder thunder past.

Soon the highway led out into the country.

There were large plantations, and the roads though narrow were passable. The Portuguese planters were startled by the apparition which burst upon their view.

But Frank did not pause to make the acquaintance of any of them. The Boomerang rolled on.

Into the heart of Africa the machine made its way.

For some days no incident worthy of note occurred. Then one day the travelers reached the banks of a large river in the wildest of all regions.

All traces of civilization had been left behind.

For many miles the Boomerang had been obliged to pick its way over ground at times exceedingly rough.

Small rivers were easily crossed, especially where the current was smooth.

Frank had constructed the Boomerang with this exigency in view. She would float in the water like a sailboat, and the wheels were provided with an arrangement by which steel flanges or paddles shot out from the axle and furnished motive power.

So that the Boomerang could cross the wildest and deepest of rivers or lakes as safely as any water craft.

The river which now burst into view was a tributary of the Congo river and was known as the Kuango.

It was at this point widened almost into a lake and dotted with numberless small islands.

Gerard, who was familiar with the country, said:

"This region is inhabited by a tribe of watermen or swimming natives called Mbesi, who live in little huts built upon posts in the saw grass regions. They swim from isle to isle, or paddle their canoes as they choose. They are a large and powerful tribe."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, with interest, "are they friendly?"

"By no means. They are the most treacherous and rascally cut-throats in Africa. They outwit the slave-traders and set at defiance all efforts to trade or make friendly acquaintance!"

"It is hardly likely that they will venture to attack us!"

"Be not so sure. They are the most daring of natives. Do you see that tract of saw-grass? Well, we shall pass directly by that and then my advice is that we had better keep in the cover of the wire screen."

"Indeed!"

"They use javelins and bows and arrows, and their aim is deadly in the extreme!"

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "I done flink I bettah git mah rifle out!"

"Every man on board should have his weapon ready!" said Gerard.

A good spot was selected and then the vehicle slid down into the water. The paddles were instantly called into requisition.

The Boomerang glided out into the current and started on its course across the river.

For a height of many feet the tall reeds arose from the shore of the islands and concealed the shore from view.

It was necessary for the Boomerang to pass quite close to these, and as it did so Gerard, who was forward, suddenly cried:

"Look out all! There is danger nigh!"

Barney, being in the pilot-house, was not exposed.

But Pomp and Frank were upon the rear deck. They were engaged in watching with interest the line of reeds.

Suddenly, and just as Gerard shouted, they both saw a curious movement in the reeds.

They seemed to quiver a moment, and then, like a bolt from an archer, a keen pointed javelin sped forth.

It just grazed Frank's skull. An inch nearer and it would have cleft it.

Gerard had sprung into the pilot-house beside Barney and was all safe.

The hint received by Frank and Pomp was sufficient. They lost no time in retreating behind the wire screen.

They had barely executed this move when a shower of arrows came flying against the netting.

These rattled upon the deck and it was then that the travelers decided to also take a hand in the sport, which they did.

CHAPTER III.

THE MBESI.

FRANK and Pomp raised their rifles and fired into the reeds.

They were compelled to fire at random, for nothing could be seen of the hidden foe.

Whether their shots took effect or not, they had no means of knowing. No outcry came back.

Not even the reeds moved, or was there any splashing of water. Only silence and an absence of any indication of human life.

"They're gone!" shouted Gerard. "Look out for the next bank of reeds!"

"Gone!" ejaculated Frank.

"Yes!"

"Is it possible they could get out of the way so quickly and noiselessly and not one show himself?"

"It is true!" declared Gerard.

"I don't understand it!"

"Well," explained the young explorer, "these rascals are adepts in this sort of warfare. You will find that there are little avenues and passages among the reeds which run in every direction, and which are made by twisting the reeds together so as to make a screen."

This battling with an unseen foe was certainly a novelty.

"Don't they ever show themselves?" asked Frank.

"Oh, yes; when the critical moment demands it. But they are strategists. You might battle with them here all day and never see one of them!"

"That is peculiar!"

"It is that!"

"Do you suppose any of our bullets took effect?"

"If so, we shall never know it. An Mbesi would never utter a cry of pain if you were to cut his heart out!"

"Begorra, it's quare sort of critters they are!" averred Barney.

"That is true, Barney," declared the young explorer, "but you will meet with queerer people before we reach the west coast."

"But we ought not to fear these arrows," said Frank.

"Ah, there is a good reason for fearing them!" said Gerard. "You will find that nearly all of them are poisoned!"

"Poisoned?"

"Ay, and to receive a wound from one is certain death. The poison is procured from the fangs of the deadly puff-adder and is fatal."

"Massy sakes!" gasped Pomp. "Dis chile jes keep his eyes open yo' kin bet. Hain't no kin' ob lub fo' poisoned arrows."

"That's me too, be jabers!" put in Barney. "I'd rather face a bathery av guns, be me sowl!"

"That is true," agreed Gerard. "The death from arrow poison is an agonizing one. To be shot is more merciful. But let us guard against the poison if we can."

"You are right," said Frank, earnestly. "We must none of us take a reckless chance."

The Boomerang was now gliding close alongside another wall of the rushes.

Not a sign of human life was visible. But a huge hippopotamus slid into the deep water.

The enemy was not in-sight but he was there just the same.

This was clearly proved, when suddenly a flight of arrows came rattling against the wire screen.

Frank laid down his rifle.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "My curiosity is aroused. I want to take a look at these curious warriors!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Gerard.

"I'm going to drive some of them out of their hiding-places. I want to take a look at them!"

"How can you do it?"

"You shall see!"

Frank went forward to the electric guns. He placed a dynamite shell in the breech.

Then he pointed the muzzle of the gun into the reeds. He pressed the electric button.

The pneumatic chamber was closed with a sharp "ping," there was a little recoil, and the shell sped on its way.

Striking in the midst of the reeds the effect can hardly be described in words.

There was a terrific roar, like the explosion of cannon, and for a height of fully fifty feet a column of water and crushed reeds rose into the air.

This was not all.

A space of several square yards in extent was laid level and dark forms in light caracles were seen scurrying into little passages among the reeds as fast as paddle could carry them.

Only for a few brief moments were the Mbesi visible.

Then they vanished as completely as if swallowed up by the river current itself.

But brief as that time had been Frank had sized up the personal aspect of the hidden foe.

The Mbesi were seen to be little muscular negroes, with enormous headgear of the feathers of water fowl.

They were armed to the teeth and were warlike to the utmost degree. On even terms they were certainly a foe not to be despised.

For a time after the explosion of the dynamite shell the Mbesi were undemonstrative.

Frank fancied that he had frightened them away, but Gerard only smiled, and said:

"When the Mbesi are silent is the time to dread them!"

And this was proved true.

The Boomerang had floated along to a narrow space between two islands, which were hemmed about with reeds.

And here the Mbesi showed their hand.

The air suddenly became black with arrows.

Also, javelins thrown at short range, fell upon the deck. But this was not all.

From the water in front of the Boomerang, there rose a rope which crossed its bow and stopped it.

Also another rope rose up in its rear. The purpose of the black warriors was plain.

They sought to entrap the Boomerang in this narrow strait between the two islands, and capture her by daring corp-de-main.

Frank saw and understood this plainly enough. He smiled grimly.

He knew that he could cut this rope and go ahead easily enough. But he did not do it.

He was curious to know what move the Mbesi would now make. He was not long left in doubt.

Almost instantly the water fairly swarmed with the black warriors. They came straight for the Boomerang's rail.

Frank stepped into the pilot-house to be ready for the savage horde. He understood the peril.

But he was also prepared for it. He did not intend that several hundred of the black denizens should come onto the deck.

So he pressed a small electric lever. The result was quickly made manifest.

The entire rail of the Boomerang, by an ingenious device, was thus charged with deadly force of electricity.

Barney and Pomp had opened upon the black rascals with their Winchesters. Gerard bounded into the pilot-house and cried:

"They are coming aboard of us, Frank. What shall we do?"

"Keep cool," replied the young inventor. "I have provided for that."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"May I ask how?"

"Keep your eyes open and you will see."

The young explorer accepted this logical bit of advice, and he did see very quickly.

Straight for the Boomerang's rail the blacks sprung. One of them placed a hand upon it.

There was a vivid flash, and he uttered a yell like that of a lost spirit and fell back into the water.

As fast as the blacks came in contact with the electrified rail they were all served the same.

The water was filled with struggling forms.

Not one of them was able to get aboard the Boomerang. One contact with the electrified rail was quite sufficient.

So terrific a shock did some of them get that they sank in the water to rise no more.

Gerard, who gazed upon the scene, was spellbound.

Of course he comprehended the situation, and said:

"Upon my word, that is more effective, Frank, than the electric gun!"

"It is fully as adequate," declared Frank, "and the slaughter is not so great."

In vain the water natives tried to get aboard the Boomerang.

Not until dozens of their best men were lying under the surface dead did they see the folly of their attempt.

And then they desisted. Their retreat was as sudden as the attack.

In a twinkling every one of them was out of sight, they retreating into the saw grass. Here they were lost to view.

"Hurrah!" cried Gerard. "That means a victory, Frank!"

"Yes," replied the young inventor, "of the kind."

"Ah, do not put too light a value upon it!" cried the explorer. "I tell you these Mbesi are foes not to be despised. All African travelers fear them."

"Well," said Frank, "do you think they will venture to attack us again?"

"Yes, I do. The Mbesi is like a bull-dog, very persistent and once he gets a grip he never lets go!"

"He will be wise and let us alone. I could annihilate the whole of them with the dynamite gun!"

"It might have been a mercy if you had!"

"Oh, but I do not like carnage. They are human beings still though of a very poor kind. Let them live!"

The deck was covered with arrows and lances and battle clubs.

These had been hurled at the Boomerang in the hopes of doing it some damage.

But the plan had failed.

The Boomerang now started forward. The rope stretched across the strait was broken like thread.

Once more into the open the machine floated.

The distant shore was seen, but a number of islands yet intervened and the course through the saw-grass was narrow and tortuous.

CHAPTER IV.

DEFEAT OF THE BLACK FOE.

GERARD had declared that the Mbesi would make another attack upon the Boomerang.

And this was proved correct.

Suddenly as the machine entered the narrow channel a host of canoes darted out of the saw-grass.

These all carried a number of closely woven nets, and Frank realized at once the danger of contact with these.

They would entwine themselves about the paddles and clog them, so that the machine would be unable to go forward.

Evidently the natives were reckoning upon this, for they were hastily spreading the nets through the water and clear across the channel.

For a moment Frank thought of turning back and thus cheating the black rascals by making a detour.

But as he looked back he saw that the water natives had begun to spread their nets in the rear as well.

The Boomerang was in a trap, though it was not yet certain but that she could sail out of it easily enough.

Had the Boomerang been a vessel, Frank would have laughed at the nets.

But, being a ground vehicle and by no means constructed for a water craft, she had not the headway or speed necessary to break through a very great obstruction.

Frank could have avoided the channel by going further up stream, and as things had turned out this might have been a better move.

But as it was, there was no way but to forge ahead and try and break through the nets.

It was strictly necessary for the voyagers to keep behind the wire screen.

A wound from one of the arrows meant certain death.

"At least I know of no antidote," declared Gerard.

So Frank put on all speed and the machine fairly dove into the midst of the canoes.

There was a jar and a shock, and a sudden rending sensation. Then the dynamos buzzed but the Boomerang obstinately refused to move.

It had come to a complete stop.

The Mbesi with yells of triumph saw this advantage that they had gained. This time in attacking the Boomerang they pursued different tactics.

A score of canoes swarmed alongside, and avoiding the deadly rail, a number of the warriors sprung on deck.

Gerard Benton was as pale as a ghost.

"My God!" he cried, "they have come aboard of us, Frank!"

The young inventor's face wore an anxious expression, but he was as cool as could be.

"Don't get excited," he said. "We will look out for them!"

Barney and Pomp shot down several of the savages upon the deck, but they could not get all in range.

The Mbesi were demons in the way of pluck, and they seemed to set death at naught.

Whenever one came in contact with the rail he was hurled overboard like a shot from a catapult.

But the wily natives had learned to look out for this.

They sprang clear of it from their canoes to the deck. The water was black with them.

The situation was critical.

It was evident that something radical must be done, and at once. But Frank Reade, Jr. had not been idle.

To fire the electric gun was out of the question, as the savages were too near to get a line upon them.

However, Frank was determined to drive them from the deck of the Boomerang if desperate means had to be resorted to to do so.

The Mbesi were pounding upon the steel network with their axes, and trying to drive their javelins through it.

Of course, it resisted all their efforts, but yet the situation was, to say the least, unpleasant.

Frank rushed into the engine room and procured a couple of electric wires. These he connected with the dynamos.

Then he carried them up into the cage where his companions were.

"What shall we do, Frank?" cried Gerard, excitedly. "We can't shoot the rascals for they are not in range of the loopholes!"

"I'll fix them!" declared the young inventor. "Barney and Pomp bring those glass legged platforms from the pilot house!"

The two servitors hastened away to do this bidding.

These wooden platforms with knobs of glass for support were provided for just such an exigency as the present.

The deck of the Boomerang was of steel. Frank could easily charge it with the electric fluid.

But in doing this he would injure himself as much as the enemy unless the non-conducting platforms were used.

Barney and Pomp quickly returned with these.

The savages were howling like fiends, and just now an incident occurred which nearly terminated the life of Frank Reade, Jr.

One of the foe found a loophole, and taking aim through it, fired an arrow at Frank.

It passed through the young inventor's coat, but barely missed cutting the skin.

Had the arrow drawn blood, it would have been the end of Frank Reade, Jr., for the arrow was a poisoned one.

For a moment everybody trembled with dread apprehension and horror.

"My God! Are you wounded, Frank?" cried Gerard.

"Beggara, it's bad cess to the devil!" howled Barney, and he let fly with his repeater.

The ball struck the black full in the eye, and he dropped instantly. But others were coming.

Pomp, however, had pressed a spring which closed all the loopholes, so that danger was disposed of for the time.

Frank pulled off his coat and drew the arrow from the lining of his inner vest.

But fortunately this was all the damage done. It had not made a flesh wound.

It was a narrow escape, and for a moment nobody felt at all like joking. Frank was the most unconcerned.

"Not the closest escape I ever had!" he said coolly, "but yet close enough for all necessary ends!"

With this plucky remark, the *esprit du corps* of the little party seemed to at once revive. Gerard picked up his rifle and cried:

"Well, let us get back at the black rascals for that. We must drive them from the deck, or they will hack their way in here and get at us!"

"Hold on!" cried Frank. "I have a better plan!"

"Ah, what is it?"

"Let all get on the glass stools."

The order was obeyed.

"Now," said Frank, "I need hardly say to look out and not come in contact with the deck!"

The young inventor wore rubber gloves, so that he was insulated, and could handle the wire with impunity.

He carried a little key in his right hand, which held the current in due check.

It was but a moment's work to fasten the heavily charged wires to a deck.

Then Frank pressed the key.

In an instant every iron or metal thing about the Boomerang was heavily charged.

What followed was comical as well as startling.

There were possibly a hundred of the black natives on the deck. As if hurled by giant hands these were unceremoniously thrown into the air.

Some of them fell on the deck insensible, some leaped overboard in terror, and others were hurled over the rail.

In less time than it takes to tell it the deck was literally cleared of the whole motley crew.

It was a complete Waterloo for the travelers.

The Mbesis were panic stricken. They could not cope successfully with such a mysterious power, and which they could not comprehend.

No doubt they were thoroughly convinced that the defenders of the Boomerang were possessed of witchcraft or other supernatural power, and from that moment the Boomerang was safe from further attack.

The Mbesis, or the survivors rather, scattered like chaff into their fastness in the reeds and were not seen again.

The nets were cut by Barney who ventured into the water under the Boomerang's bow.

Then the Boomerang went on without further molestation to the opposite bank of the Kuango.

"Well," said Gerard, with a breath of relief, "I am satisfied. We have certainly done a big thing in subduing the Mbesis; they are the worst lot of natives in Africa."

Beyond the Kuango river was a long, level stretch of prairie and over this the Boomerang bowled merrily.

It had just been swept by a fire and therefore the surface was quite smooth.

For miles the Boomerang kept on at tremendous speed.

Then night shut down.

In the tropics there is very little twilight; with the going down of the sun all becomes dark almost instantly.

As it was unpleasant as well as difficult to travel by night, the Boomerang was usually laid up in some good spot, and the travelers spent the night there.

Upon the present occasion a small oasis was sighted in the broad, and level plain.

This was a clump of trees and jungle. As the Boomerang drew up in its verge, chattering troops of monkeys went racing among the tree branches.

As there was a water-hole near, it was decided to stop here for the night.

Barney got out, and collecting some fagots, started a fire. He had just ignited it when a literal swarm of poisonous snakes emerged from holes in the porous soil.

Now if there is one thing that an Irishman is afraid of it is a snake.

The Celt gave one yeli, and made a flying leap for the deck of the Boomerang.

"Howly murther!" he gasped. "Divil a bit do I want to do wid thim spalpeens, bad cess to thim!"

CHAPTER V.

MONARCHS OF THE JUNGLE.

BARNEY'S yell of alarm, of course, brought everybody out on deck. The Celt was dancing about like a maniac.

Pomp laughed hilariously, but Gerard said seriously:

"It is lucky that you did get out of the way, Barney. Those are very deadly reptiles. They are puff adders, and their fangs are deadly."

"Be jabbers, I don't want any part av thim!" declared the Celt, "divil a foire will I make out there!"

"There is no need of making a fire out there!" said Frank.

"Pomp can do all his cooking aboard the machine!"

"Dat am so, sah!" affirmed Pomp, "jes, yo' bring me a brace ob dem fine fat pheasants ober dere in de woods an' I show you berry quick!"

The pheasants alluded to by the darky were beauties of their species, and were visible in the jungle near.

Barney shot two of them, even at that distance, but positively declined to go for them.

"Av anybody wants thim, be me sowl he kin go an' get thim!" he declared; "bad cess to the snakes, but I'll niver do it!"

Pomp, who had seen too many boyhood experiences with the Moccasins and rattlers of the sunny South to be afraid of snakes, volunteered to go.

He went and returned safely to the amazement of Barney.

"Mebbe it's a snake charmer yez are!" he cried. "Shure I've heard that snakes will niver bite a haythin, anyway!"

"Golly!" ejaculated Pomp, "dat may be de berry reason why yo am so afraid ob being bited!"

The pheasants were roasted for supper and made a toothsome meal. The little jungle and patch of woods seemed filled with animal and bird life.

All manner of gorgeously plumed songsters flew among the branches. The monkeys came down in troops to inspect the new arrival, the curious invention of man.

They evidently viewed it with favor, for after a considerable spell of gibberish they came slowly down a branch near.

Then about a dozen of them laid hold of tails and swung down, making a living pendulum many yards in length.

Swinging with momentum increased, the lowest monkey was swept over the rail of the Boomerang and clutched it.

Instantly down this living ladder came a half hundred of the romping denizens.

They ran chattering over the deck until Frank came suddenly out of the cabin.

Then up the ladder they went like a streak, the lower monkey let go his hold, and the living rope went up like a flash.

It was amusement to the travelers, and so absorbed were they in the antics of the monkeys that they were indeed startled when the earth trembled with a sudden awful roar.

Though none of the party but Gerard had ever seen a live African lion in his native jungle, they all knew that the king of beasts was the author of that terrifying call.

And as they turned, there he stood in the very verge of the jungle, a monster of his species.

He was lashing his yellow tail and glaring at the Boomerang fiendishly.

Despite the fact that the travelers felt safe in their steel cage, they regarded the monster not without terror.

"Golly!" gasped Pomp with chattering teeth, "kain't say dat I want to make de close acquaintance ob dat chap."

"Be jabbers, he's enuff to give wan a nightmare!" chattered Barney.

"Are—are you quite sure this cage is safe, Frank?" asked Gerard.

"Those fellows are powerful beyond all powers of realization."

Frank laughed at this.

"Have no fears!" he cried; "that chap will never dare to tackle us. If he does he will get the worst of it."

"I think he will attack us," said Gerard.

"You do?"

"Yes, and I know these African lions quite well. They are a very ferocious animal."

"Well," said the young inventor, stoutly, "I cannot see the policy of running from him."

"By no means! but—Ab, look there!"

The lion at this moment shook his shaggy mane and roared until the echoes came back like the reverberation of thunder.

Then he advanced slowly toward the Boomerang.

Once he paused sniffing the air.

"He has our scent," said Gerard, "be assured, he means business!"

Then Barney acting upon the impulse did a foolish thing.

He rushed to a loophole and fired at the lion.

His aim was true enough, but, of course, the bullet did not give a fatal wound.

In an instant the big beast was coming full bent for the machine. It was a thrilling moment.

He cleared the rail and struck against the steel cage with fearful impact.

The Boomerang shook from stem to stern. For a moment it seemed as if the king of beasts would come right through the light cage.

But he did not.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew of what sort of material this was made, and was not fearful of its giving way.

Gerard fled into the cabin, and Barney and Pomp to the pilot-house.

The lion got in some savage work with his claws upon the netting, but could not tear his way through.

Frank very coolly regarded the beast, as he clung to the netting, trying vainly to claw his way through.

"For mercy's sake, Frank, don't take any chances!" cried Gerard.

"Don't worry," said the young inventor, coolly. "I don't mean to."

He watched the lion for some moments. He was deliberating upon the best method of killing him, when Pomp came out of the engine-room.

"Here, Marse Frank!" he cried. "I done fink we fix him dis way!"

The darky had rubber gloves on, and held a wire gingerly at arm's length. Frank saw the point.

"Good for you, Pomp!" he cried. "That is just what will do it!"

The darky ventured close to the netting where the lion now hung with his body pressed firm against it.

It was an easy matter to thrust the wire through and against the lion's body, taking care not to charge the cage at the same time.

Then Pomp turned on the current.

The lion was a powerful monster, but the electric current more powerful.

With a terrible roar the beast was fairly hurled from the cage and over the rail.

There it floundered about on the ground. Barney and Gerard poured shots into him with their rifles.

In a few moments the struggle was over.

The king of beasts was subdued. Death had overcome him.

"Whooray!" yelled Barney. "Yez are a brick, naygur! Shure it's his skin we'll have fer a foine rug!"

"Yes, he has magnificent fur," said Gerard; "he is as splendid a specimen as I ever saw."

Frank opened the cage door and stepped out on deck.

"Bring your knives, Barney and Pomp," he cried. "Flay him while he is yet warm!"

"Then give his carcass to the hyenas," said Gerard. "There will be a million of them down here after dark."

"All roight, sor!" cried Barney. "Git a move on yez, naygur!"

"Sposin' yo' do de same, I'ish!" retorted the darky. "Doan' be liebe yo' kin do dat any quicker den I can."

"Easy there! Don't get to quarreling," admonished Frank.

Then the two jokers, with long flaying knives, appeared. But just as they were leaving the deck they were brought to a sharp halt.

A frightful roar woke the echoes. Instantly they scampered back into the cage.

"Golly!" gasped Pomp. "Wha' ebber was dat?"

"Begorra, the big devil's cum to loife agin!" cried Barney.

"No!" cried Gerard. "There is the lioness and her cubs. See!"

This was true.

From the forest depths the dead lion's mate had come.

She had heard the shots, and scented the blood from afar.

There she stood in the edge of the jungle, a thrilling picture. Her head was reared high, and she was gazing at the Boomerang with apparent curiosity and anger.

Barney was about to open upon her with his Winchester.

But Frank cried:

"No, do not do that! Let us see what she will do!"

"That is right!" cried Gerard. "We know that she cannot harm us!"

Two cubs were with her. These were little fellows, yet evidently about weaned. They were frolicking in the jolliest kind of a way.

For some moments the lioness regarded the Boomerang in this curious manner.

She growled, but her voice was not like that of the lion. Suddenly she began to advance, lashing her tail.

Nearer she drew to the Boomerang, sniffing the air constantly. It was certain that she had scented the blood of her dead mate.

She suddenly came in sight of him lying in the grass. With one bound she reached him.

She smelled him all over, and licked the blood from his shaggy mane. Then she struck him a playful blow with her paw.

He did not answer, and the realization evidently burst upon her that he was dead.

This caused her to utter lugubrious moans and cries which brought the cubs tumbling up to the spot.

Lashing her tail in a broken hearted manner she circled about the body of her dead mate.

The explorers would have felt some keen pangs of compunction had she been a harmless species of animal.

But as it was they were fully conscious of their good fortune in having the protection of the cage.

"Wouldn't she avenge his fate if she could get at us!" cried Gerard.

"Well, you may be sure she would."

"Begorra I'm glad I'm not out there!" declared Barney, with a shiver.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE RAPIDS.

"We are not done with her yet," declared Frank.

This was true.

The lioness suddenly ceased her lamentations. One of her cubs essayed to play with her, but she cuffed him yards away.

It was evident that her spirit was aroused. She thirsted for vengeance.

She rose upon her haunches, and at that moment saw the travelers in the cage.

The effect was thrilling.

Her jaws opened and shut with a ringing snap, and she uttered a loud roar.

Then with one bound she cleared the rail and came flying against the steel cage.

But it proved as effective a shield against her attacks as that of her mate.

In vain she clawed and growled.

The wire netting was firm.

"What will we do, Frank?" cried Gerard, "shall we give her the same dose?"

"Of course!" replied the young inventor, "there is no other course."

"But it seems too bad to leave the cubs without a mother."

"Shoot them, too. There are too many such ravenous beasts in the world."

Nobody could deny the logic of this. So Pomp gave the lioness the same treatment that he had the lion.

She soon lay dead beside her liege lord. The cubs were easily shot and now the coast seemed clear.

The monkeys came chattering back in the trees, which was evidence that there were no more of the savage beasts in the vicinity.

So Barney and Pomp this time descended in safety, and removed the skins of the two lions and the cubs.

Then the position of the Boomerang was changed some few hundred yards to the west.

Then darkness shut down.

Pomp had prepared a steaming meal, and all proceeded to do justice to it.

While they were all in the cabin thus eating, there came a series of strange sounds as if something was beating furiously against the cage.

Out on deck all rushed.

It was a curious sight which they beheld. Numberless small black objects were beating against the cage.

They were seen to be vampire bats, legions of which were attracted by the glare of the electric light.

Some of them, dashing too hard, fell upon the deck, fluttering and limp.

For fully an hour these curious night visitants continued to assail the Boomerang.

Then they vanished as quickly as they had come.

Gerard explained this by pointing up to a number of huge birds, which circled high up in the darkened sky.

"Those are the African night hawks," he declared. "They are the terror of the vampire!"

Now, from the distance, came prolonged howls and cries. These were the hyenas coming to their feast.

They had scented the carcasses of the lions, and were eager to be the first to tear and rend them.

Soon a legion of them were wrangling and quarreling over the refuse. Gerard made remark:

"To-morrow you will hardly find a bone," he said. "The hyenas are the greatest scavengers on earth!"

"I believe you!" agreed Frank. "The prairie coyote is not in their class."

With this episode the exciting events of the night ended.

Barney was elected to watch the first half of the night and Pomp the latter.

Daybreak found all once more on deck and ready for the resumption of the journey.

Leaving the oasis the Boomerang once more bowled away over the broad prairie.

Good time was made for a while, but after the noon hour the ground became more uneven and great savannas came to view.

Here there were treacherous quagmires and mud holes, and it was necessary to make many miles detour to the northward.

Great herds of buffalo were started from the deep glens, and there were plenty of deer.

The heat was something intolerable, and the travelers were fain to lie about the deck half naked.

Great care was now necessary not to get mired.

This was much to be dreaded for it would not be easy to lift the Boomerang out of the quicksand.

Since leaving the Mbesi nothing had been seen of any natives.

But Gerard said:

"I am familiar with this region. I once penetrated far beyond here. We shall soon be in the Kassongo Country. The Mairis Country is just to the south, and the two nations are ever at war."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, "are they peaceably inclined toward the white man?"

"The Kassongos are. But the Mairis are the most treacherous and deadly of all the black tribes."

"Indeed!"

"But the Kassongos, naturally a peaceful people, have a worse foe to dread than their black neighbors."

"Indeed! What may it be?"

"All through this region the slave hunter has left his foul tracks. They are the curse of Central Africa."

Frank's eyes flashed.

"We may come across some of the gentry," he said.

"Oh, we are sure to!"

"Then we may be able to give them an opinion of their nefarious occupation."

"Good for you!" cried Gerard. "You have a soul. I hope you will give them a severe lesson."

"I will endeavor to."

For two days the Boomerang made an effort to circuit the quags. It finally resulted in reaching a broad and swift river.

Frank selected a good place to ford and pushed the Boomerang into the water.

The machine started for the opposite shore.

All speed was put on the paddles but they seemed wholly inadequate. The current swept the machine momentarily down stream.

A cry of alarm escaped Gerard.

"Oh, Frank!" he shouted; "we are going full on the rocks!"

Glancing down stream the young inventor saw the deadly rapids just below.

It was a moment of intense peril. In vain he crowded the dynamos. The unwieldy machine could not stem the current.

If it should strike those jagged rocks there was a strong likelihood that the running gear, if not the body of the Boomerang, would be wrecked.

It looked as if the great journey, not half completed, was to meet with an ignominious end.

All was the most intense excitement.

"My God, we are lost!" cried Gerard in an agony.

But Frank's quick eye saw a way out of the dilemma.

He rushed out upon deck with a huge coil of rope. One end of this he looped about the mast in the bow of the Boomerang.

"Come here, Pomp!" he shouted.

"A'right, sah!" cried the darky with alacrity.

"You are a good swimmer?"

"Yes, sah."

"Then take the end of this rope. Over with you and make the shore. Throw it around the nearest tree."

Pomp needed no second bidding.

Over the rail he went.

He was a literal water dog.

He breasted the current with ease, and catching an eddy, was swept toward the shore.

A moment later he crawled out of the water.

Up the bank he sprang. There was a huge oak just over the bank. About this he threw the coil of rope.

A half hitch and then the slack came up to a taut line. The Boomerang was anchored.

There the machine hung in the powerful current.

There was danger, of course, of the rope breaking. The tension was tremendous.

Gerard threw off his coat.

"Give me another rope, Frank!" he cried. "I'm a good swimmer. I can make it."

Over the rail went the daring young explorer.

He breasted the current nobly. Soon two ropes held the Boomerang from the deadly rapids.

For the nonce the machine was safe. But how was it to be pulled ashore?

Gerard and Pomp tried their strength on the ropes, but it was of no avail.

The weight was too great. Seeing this Frank cried:

"Hold on! I'll come out to help you!"

He and Barney leaped overboard, and also swam ashore. But the combined strength of all four was not sufficient.

Here was a predicament.

What was to be done?

Frank conceived the idea of attaching another rope to the stern and going down stream to get a different bearing on the Boomerang. But to his dismay he saw that the stern had drifted in between two huge rocks, and this was what was holding the machine so fast.

For a moment the travelers were overcome with despair.

As well might the Boomerang have gone over the rapids. It apparently could not be extricated.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Gerard. "We are done for now. Is it not a pity that this catastrophe should terminate our trip?"

"Don't be so sure of it!" said Frank, ever hopeful.

"Do you believe the Boomerang can ever be got off that rock?"

"We will never cease trying!"

But at this moment Barney and Pomp came running down the bank in terror.

There was apparently good cause for this, for glancing up to the bank above Frank and Gerard saw a number of naked forms slip out of the deep forest.

They were savages armed with bows and javelins.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SLAVE HUNTERS.

At that moment Frank Reade, Jr. fully expected to feel the point of a poisoned arrow and to realize that his life's work was done.

But this did not come.

On the contrary Gerard gave a cry of joy.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "The friendly Kassongos! Now we shall have help, Frank!"

"Friendly!" gasped the young inventor. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't I tell you that the Kassongos were friendly to the white man?"

"Then these are the friendly natives! We are in luck!"

"That we are!" cried Gerard, gaily.

The chief of the deputation of Kassongos was coming down the bank and making friendly demonstrations of welcome.

Gerard met him half way.

In his former explorations in the dark continent he had made himself fairly familiar with the language of the Kassongos.

This stood him in good stead now for he was able to make the chief understand him.

Gerard and the chief were almost immediately upon pleasant terms.

Great strong fellows were the Kassongos, just the type for the slave hunters to select.

"Frank!" cried Gerard, turning about, "this is King Kalolo, and one of the big chiefs of the tribe. He swears to be our friend."

Frank returned the black chief's salutation and Gerard went on:

"He tells me that there is a slave hunting gang of Portuguese not twenty miles above here now. They are about to attack and devastate a village."

Frank's blood tingled.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"I know Kalolo for an honest man."

"If the Boomerang was only out of this scrape we would go there at once."

"If that is the only barrier!" cried Gerard, "we'll soon remedy that."

Frank was surprised.

"How?" he asked.

"Why, here are a score of these muscular blacks. They can pull a tree up by the roots. They will gladly help us!"

"Ask them," said Frank, eagerly.

Gerard hastened to do this.

The reply was prompt.

"Kalolo says that he will do anything we ask of him if we will only help him defeat the slave hunters!"

"Tell him he may be sure of that," replied Frank.

"Then you will see the Boomerang come ashore safely."

The entire band of blacks now laid hold of the ropes. Of course such tremendous power could not help but tell.

The big machine slowly stemmed the current and began to come ashore.

Steadily the natives drew on the ropes, and then with a loud cheer the Boomerang rolled out of the water.

"What did I tell you?" cried Gerard, joyfully. "Now we are ready for fun, Frank."

"Yes," agreed the young inventor, "for it will be indeed fun to defeat those rascally slave traders."

Kalolo and his men were much interested in the Boomerang.

They crowded about it, examining it carefully. Their admiration and interest was unbounded.

As soon as possible the travelers boarded the machine and took a northward course for the beleaguered village as directed by Kalolo.

The natives ran alongside the machine. The twenty miles was covered in the course of the day, the blacks being wonderful travelers.

Toward night distant firing was heard. The heavy jungle prevented the scene of action from being seen.

Skirting this after a time a wide clearing in the edge of a mighty forest was seen.

Here were the curious conical huts of the blacks.

The village was surrounded with a high stockade of palisades, with intricate brushwork to protect the warriors who were defending the place.

The Boomerang entered the clearing just at a critical moment.

A large band of white men and hostile Mairis, armed with rifles, were just about to carry a part of the stockade.

The Kassongos, who knew that they were fighting for their liberty, were defending the pass most desperately.

But the foe seemed to have the best of it on account of their superior weapons and tactics.

"The red dogs are!" cried Gerard. "Run them to earth!"

The Boomerang went booming down toward them.

The chief Kalolo, and his men rushed excitedly toward the stockade, waving their arms and yelling wildly to their friends.

The slave hunters must have been amazed at the sudden appearance of the Boomerang upon the scene, for they suddenly ceased firing.

Then they beat a retreat to the cover of the jungle.

Frank brought the Boomerang between them and the native town and faced it about.

This was no sooner done than one of the slave hunters—a tall, powerful Portuguese—stepped out into view and hailed the machine.

"Who the devil are you?" he cried, in Spanish. "What do you want here?"

Frank was a good linguist and understood Spanish perfectly well. At once he answered:

"We are Americans, and slavery was long since abolished in our country!"

A Spanish oath came back.

"Well, I am Miguel Esperanza, and chief of this band. We ask you to go on your way and leave us to our own devices?"

"I would be a traitor to justice and a coward to do that!" replied Frank.

"Then you mean to interfere with us?"

"We do! We mean to defend these simple and unprotected natives from your designs!"

Fury most fearful showed itself in Miguel Esperanza's manner.

"Interfere with us and you die," he hissed. "We will break your wagon all to pieces!"

"I warn you not to try it," replied Frank, grimly. "You have the chance to escape condign punishment. I advise you to go on your way and let these people alone!"

"We defy you!" yelled the slave hunter.

Then he dodged back into the jungle. The next moment a storm of bullets came rattling against the cage.

Of course they did no harm.

But the onslaught angered Frank. He went forward to the electric gun.

"I've a mind to give it to those fellows savage," he said.

"They deserve it," said Gerard.

"No doubt; and yet I shrink from human slaughter."

"Ah, but they are many times murderers! There is no reason why they should not be punished."

"You are right!" agreed Frank. "I will give them one shot anyway."

With which he trained the gun.

It was lucky that he did so, for at that moment from the jungle burst forth the entire attacking party.

It was plain that they intended to attack the Boomerang. They were speedily to repent their folly.

Quick as a flash, Frank depressed the muzzle of the gun and pressed the electric lever.

There was a slight shock as the pneumatic chamber worked, and the gun was discharged.

The shell struck in a heap of jungle grass directly in front of the advancing foe.

The havoc created was frightful.

Up into the air rose a heap of debris and shattered human forms. One such shot was enough.

It was sufficient to show the slave hunters that their efforts were naught alongside this terrific engine of warfare.

Frank sent another shot after them to effectually disperse them, and the battle was over.

"They will not return," said Gerard, positively. "Their leader is dead. I saw him when he was blown up!"

The joy of the Kassongos at their unexpected deliverance was most intense.

Kalolo and his men had already spread the fame of the Boomerang through the native town.

Men, women and children all turned out to see the famous vehicle which had proved their deliverance.

It would be difficult to picture the scene with words.

A grand evening fete was ordered by the king. A native feast was also prepared.

The Boomerang could not proceed further just then, for the shades of night were fast settling down.

It was as good a place as could be selected to pass the night, and Frank so announced it. Everybody was satisfied with the decision.

The simple hearted Kassongos were delighted and did all in their power to entertain their visitors.

After the feast, which consisted of a roasted buffalo, a moon dance was given by the young men and women.

Then the native musicians played a wild and weird melody upon reed instruments and rude drums.

This completed the night's entertainment, and a little past midnight everybody retired to rest.

The search-light turned full upon the jungle guarded well against any attack from that direction.

So the night passed without incident.

Shortly after dawn negro runners came in with the announcement that the slave hunters had abandoned their position and gone down the river in canoes on their way to the sea.

This was joyful news to the villagers and they hailed the explorers and the Boomerang as their deliverers.

Kalolo the king made Frank a present of several beautiful and very valuable ivory tusks as evidence of his gratitude.

The young inventor was much pleased. Overtures were made to confer an unlimited number of wives upon him, but he hastily declined this honor.

It was of course impracticable to remain longer in the vicinity. So leave was taken of the Kassongos, much to their regret.

The Boomerang left the little town far behind and soon was well along on her way to the east coast.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE DARK FOREST.

FOR many days the Boomerang kept on her course over wild plains, broken country, skirting high mountains, and threading its way across intricate valleys.

The course they were now pursuing was likely to bring them to Lake Tanganyika.

They were now in the region unexplored by Gerard, and he was right in his element.

This was just what he had desired, and he was constantly upon the qui vive to note all the various points of interest.

To mention all the incidents of the great journey from coast to coast would require many volumes.

One day, after a long run across a prairie, they entered a deep and intensely dark wood.

There was no way but to cut right through this, which was done. The Boomerang pushed on for awhile in a sort of wide path, which Gerard averred was an elephant trail.

"They go down this way to water," he declared. "It is very easy to see that."

"In that case," said Frank, "we ought to come upon some of the monsters before long."

"We are apt to at any moment."

But though the Boomerang penetrated rapidly deeper into the forest yet nothing was seen of the elephants.

But it now became necessary to use the search-light so intense was the gloom though it was midday.

The trees were so tall and the branches so intertwined that the sun could not find its way through.

"We are now in the Dark Forest of Central Africa," declared Gerard. "This is the abode of the mysterious dwarfs and also of the giant ape or gorilla."

"Begorra, I'd loike to see wan av thim," averred Barney.

Pomp laughed.

"Phwat are yez larfin' at, yez black divil?" spluttered the Celt.

"Yo' only jes' need luk in de glass fo' to see one!" cried Pomp, and then laughed uproariously.

"Be me sowl, I'll have the heart av yez fer that insult!" cried the Celt, making a dive for Pomp.

He caught him, and the two went reeling about the deck in a friendly wrestle.

This was suddenly terminated by the Boomerang coming uncereemoniously to a halt.

"Be jabers phwat's happened?" cried Barney, breaking away from his antagonist.

Frank had brought the machine to a stop for a good reason.

The undergrowth had suddenly closed in so thickly that it was difficult to proceed.

While the young inventor was deliberating upon the best way to overcome this difficulty a startling thing occurred.

Suddenly a snarling cry came from a copse nearby.

All on the deck turned a gaze in that direction.

What they saw none of them ever forgot. It was a most terrifying sight.

There in the verge of the copse was a giant form. It was at first impression a strange species of man with a hairy skin.

So human like did the apparition look, that all in the party gazed at it spell-bound.

None but Gerard had ever seen the gorilla in his native haunts. But this was an unusually large specimen of the beast.

"Great Heavens!" gasped Gerard, "that is the biggest ape I ever saw. Look out for him!"

The gorilla was regarding the machine with apparently the deepest of amazement.

His prodigious arms reached fully to his feet. In one hand he carried a cudgel as large in diameter as a small tree.

The strength and tenacity of the gorilla is well known. Nothing in the animal kingdom compares with it.

This monster ape could, with ease, rend the most ferocious lion or fell an elephant with a blow of his club.

What would be the result of an attack upon the Boomerang?

This same thought had occurred to every one in the party. It gave each a terrible chill.

With his tremendous power and superior powers of comprehension to the lions which had attacked the machine why might he not succeed in breaking through the cage?

"Mither, presarve us!" gasped Barney, with chattering teeth, "it's the divil himsilf!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp in sheer terror, "dis chile doa' want nuffin to do wif dat critter!"

Gerard and Frank were for the moment speechless. Barney recovering himself picked up his rifle.

But Gerard cried out in terror.

"No, no! Don't fire! It will do no good!"

"Be me sowl an' why not?" cried the perplexed Irishman. "Shure wud yez let him ate us all up!"

"No; but you cannot kill him at this distance!" cried Gerard, "they are a very hard animal to kill and you should shoot only at close range!"

"Put up your gun, Barney," said Frank, authoritatively.

The Celt obeyed with reluctance. But the gorilla had by this time finished his cursory survey of the machine.

And he quickly ended the suspense of the travelers by making action.

First he opened his mouth, displaying hideous fangs, and let out a terrific bellow.

It was answered from the depths of the forest.

"Ye gods!" gasped Gerard, "there are others near!"

The gorilla now advanced slowly toward the Boomerang, brandishing his prodigious club.

His sullen eyes flashed viciously, and it was plain that he meditated a savage attack upon the machine.

Frank went to the pilot-house and charged the rail of the Boomerang with electricity.

Then the travelers waited.

Straight on came the gorilla. Then whirling his club aloft he flung it with lightning speed straight at the cage.

It struck the netting with such force that the structure shook. Then with a snarling cry the gorilla put a hand on the rail.

He gave it one savage pull and away came a section of it. But in that instant he received the full shock of the electric current.

The result was peculiar.

The brute's strength was prodigious, but the electric fluid was superior. It felled him like an ox.

But it was not a sufficient shock to kill him. He was only momentarily confused.

Then maddened bellows broke from him and he sprang upon the deck like a panther, clearing rail and all.

Straight for the steel cage he came, and for a moment it seemed as if he would actually tear his way through it.

But it resisted his best efforts, and Gerard cried:

"The steel is too much for him, Frank. Where is your electric wire?"

The insulated wire was brought from the engine-room. But it now became difficult to get it in contact with him.

For the brute did not stay any length of time in one place. He went to the top of the cage, and then aft to the rear mast, where he tore down the ropes and flag and rent it into shreds.

"Begorra, I've a mind to give him wan fer that," cried Barney.

"Go ahead," cried Frank. "Shoot at him! Anything to kill the brute!"

So Barney and Pomp both drew a line upon the brute. They fired at him at that easy range.

The bullets, however, seemed to have little effect upon him, further than to increase his fury.

Whereupon Gerard cried:

"Never mind his head! The bullets will glance off his skull! Fire for his abdomen!"

Before this advice could be heeded, however, the beast was back on top of the netting.

Then he rushed forward, and here once more our travelers got a shot at him.

This time it told.

The bullet from Barney's rifle opened the brute's abdomen, and struck a vital part.

He reeled, furiously tried again to get at those in the cage, then sank panting down.

In a very few moments his career was ended. And the African travelers were not sorry.

It was now looked for his mate to appear, but for some reason or other he did not.

Frank found by making a detour that he could get into clear space in the forest again and the Boomerang went on.

Full two days more were spent in the dark woods.

Then suddenly the machine came out into clear country again. Far to the eastward were rolling plains.

Once more the Boomerang sped on over clear ground.

Of course there were slight obstructions to avoid, such as large stones, clumps of trees, and occasionally a stream to ford.

But the Boomerang kept on without accident all of that day.

At this juncture Frank took his bearings, just as if he was at sea. He made an important announcement.

"We are nearly two thirds of the way across the Continent," he declared. "In a day or two we should sight Lake Tanganyika."

Cheers greeted this announcement.

It was indeed gratifying to know that they had surmounted so many difficulties with success.

But all realized that the future held perhaps a harder course than any yet encountered.

"It will be no joke to cross Lake Tanganyika," declared Gerard. "It is a mighty sheet of water, and the Boomerang is not specially seaworthy."

"I have thought of a detour around the southern end," said Frank.

"You will strike a very marshy region between that and Lake Mocrö."

"If it is possible for the machine to float, it will be the best course for us to pursue."

"Wait until we get to Lake Tanganyika and we can decide? But stay! I have a plan."

CHAPTER IX.

BARNEY AND POMP HAVE SOME FUN.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"If I remember right an old explorer told me that the lower part of Tanganyika was cut up with peninsulas and islands, making narrow straits just as in the Kuango river."

"Indeed!"

"If we find that true we shall have but little trouble in picking our way across by easy stages."

"Let us hope that we will," said Frank. "I have no desire to encounter shipwreck."

"Nor I, in waters infested with crocodiles, hippopotamus and any amount of deadly reptiles. We will not anticipate it, though."

"By no means!"

As Frank had predicted a day later the waters of the great African lake burst into view.

It was like looking out upon the mighty ocean, and the travelers gazed upon the great fresh water sea with deep interest.

The country was picturesque to a great degree about Lake Tanganyika. The lake at this point could only be approached by descending high bluffs and crossing a beach of white sand fully half a mile wide.

The Boomerang was stopped on the summit of the bluffs and Frank cried:

"We will stay here for a while; I have some little repairing to do to the machinery. We can in the meanwhile decide how best to cross the lake, and you, Gerard, can do some little exploring on your own account."

"Which is an opportunity I have long sought," cried Gerard, readily.

So camp was made on the spot.

There were no signs of natives, hostile or friendly, so that no fears might be entertained on this score.

Gerard was in his element and speedily prepared for a trip along the lake shore.

"I will be back before nightfall," he cried. "Have no fears of my safety; I am perfectly familiar with the country."

"Yet if you have not returned before a late hour, shall we not search for you?" asked Frank.

"If I do not turn up safely before to-morrow morning you may know something has befallen me!" said Gerard.

"All right!"

With this the young explorer left the machine. He at once started away up the beach and was soon lost to sight.

Barney and Pomp assisted Frank on the machinery for some while, then an idea occurred to the Celt.

"Begorra, naygur!" he cried, "I'll give yez an invite."

"Wha' am dat, I'ish?" asked Pomp.

"I'm atther dyn' fer a swim. Shure, if yez will go wid me I'll take a bit av a dip in the lake!"

"I'll do dat, sah!"

Frank did not object, and away the two jokers went.

But on account of quicksands they found it difficult to get down to the water's edge.

However, they found a small creek near, and following this up a little ways came to an inviting pool.

It was but a moment's work for Barney to disrobe.

Pomp was about to follow suit when an exigency presented itself.

The trees about were filled with monkeys. If the swimmers left their clothes upon the bank unguarded these rollicking rascals would certainly steal them.

"Bejabers, I'd niver trust thim chattering divils!" declared Barney. "Shure, wud yez watch my clothes till I've had me swim, naygur, an' thim I'll watch yours."

"Dat am de bes' way," agreed Pomp. "Go on wif yo' dip."

Barney leaped into the water and Pomp sat down on his friend's garments.

It was a warm day and the sun had a narcotic effect upon Pomp's brain. He grew rapidly very sleepy.

"Dat man am jes' takin' his time 'bout dat swim!" he muttered. "I done fink dis chile sleep till he come back."

And stretching himself out Pomp was soon fast asleep.

Barney had a gay time in the warm water of the creek for a time. Then he crawled out reluctantly to yield his place to Pomp.

But as he reached the top of the bank he saw the ducky fast asleep. He chuckled with glee.

"Begorra, I'll not spile his foine nap!" he said. "Shure, it's a fool I'd be to do that."

So back he went into the water.

After disporting himself to his heart's content, he crawled out on the white sands a short distance below.

Here he stretched himself out in the warm rays of the sun to dry himself. And as he basked there he also grew strangely drowsy.

"Begorra, I'll have a bit av a nap mesilf!" he muttered, "it's sauce for the goose as well as the gander!"

In a few moments he was therefore sound asleep.

Meanwhile Pomp woke up.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes and then looked at the sun with amazement.

It was low down in the west, an indication that he had slept for many hours.

"Golly!" he burst forth. "Wha' am de mattah wif dat I'ishman? 'Pears like he am takin' a drefful long swim!"

With which he scrambled to his feet and glanced over the edge of the bank.

The sight which rewarded his gaze froze his blood and caused him to yell out with horror.

"Golly fo' glory!" he screamed. "Wha' am dat?"

There, in the sands, partly out of the water, lay a giant crocodile.

The monster had certainly emerged from the depths where Barney had been swimming.

Pomp could form but one conclusion. The monster's sides were distended. His watery eyes blinked and seemed to say to Pomp:

"I've got him!"

The terrified ducky shook like an aspen. Great beads of sweat stood out upon him.

"Massy Lordy!" he gasped. "He hab eat dat I'ishman up. Wha' Massa Frank say to dat?"

Fully impressed that this was an incontrovertible fact, Pomp gathered up Barney's clothes and fled back to the Boomerang with the dire report.

Meanwhile, Barney slept the sleep of the just until sundown.

Then he awoke with a start. He sprang up with a guilty sense.

"Bejabers, what will the naygur think?" he cried. "Shure, it's not hardly a square thing fer me to do! I'll go back an' see!"

He clambered over the bank and soon reached the spot where he had left Pomp and his clothes.

They were gone!

For a moment Barney was mad.

"The thrick av him," he cried, "to run off wid me clothes an' lave me in sich a—"

Then he came to a sudden stop. At that moment he caught sight of the crocodile.

"Mither av Moses," he gasped, "what an ugly crather!"

Then a fearful thought struck him. He drew conclusions from the crocodile's fat sides as had Pomp.

"Begorra, he's ate the naygur up, an' me clothes as well!" he muttered. "Bad cess to him!"

With this horrifying thought Barney started for the Boomerang.

He ran on until he reached the sandy beach. Then a startling scene burst upon his gaze.

The distant crack of rifles was heard, and the astonished Celt saw that the air was filled with flying arrows all about the Boomerang.

He came to a dismayed halt.

The Boomerang was an object of attack by a gang of natives. Here was truly a predicament.

The sensations experienced by the Celt can well be imagined.

There he was upon the sandy beach, cowering, stark naked, behind a sand dune.

How to reach the Boomerang was a question. Furthermore, he was thinking of the awful end of Pomp, whom he believed had been eaten up by the crocodile.

It would be hard to describe in words at that moment the agony of mind experienced by Barney.

"Och hone, if I'd only sthayed aboard the machine!" he wailed.

"Shure, I'll niver go wanderin' off agin. Howiver will I get back to Mither Frank!"

Pomp on reaching the Boomerang had given Frank a thrilling account of Barney's fate.

That he had been eaten by a crocodile the darky was certain. Of course Frank was horrified.

"Stay here by the Boomerang!" he cried, picking up his rifle. "I don't believe that Barney is dead an' I'll find him."

"Golly, Marse Frank!" gasped the excited darky, "don' yo' go an' git eated up, too. Let dis chile go!"

But Frank was prevented from going by a thrilling circumstance.

Just as he reached the rail of the Boomerang he heard a strange series of sounds, which came from the forest near.

Then out into view dashed a number of naked savages.

They charged upon the Boomerang, flourishing their weapons wildly.

Frank had just time to get back into the cage when the arrows came rattling all about.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp. "We're in a scrape now!"

"You are right!" cried Frank, "but get your rifle, Pomp. Open fire on those rascals at once!"

The darky needed no second bidding.

He was instantly at the loophole and firing at the savages as rapidly as his repeater would work.

This hot fire drove the blacks back to the cover of the woods. But only for a time.

They came out again to the attack and were again repulsed. Again and again they came.

Thus the fight went on until darkness shut down. And now the real peril began.

Frank feared an attack now more than ever. But yet the blacks did not venture out of the woods.

It was no telling at what moment though they might come.

CHAPTER X.

GERARD'S ADVENTURES.

So Frank Reade, Jr., was determined to be ready for them. But this was not all of weight upon his mind.

He was impressed with the horrifying fact that Pomp's tale of Barney's fate was all too true.

"You should not have gone to sleep, you careless fellow," he said, chidingly.

There were tears in Pomp's eyes.

"Golly, dis chile know dat well enuff, Marse Frank! I'se cl'ar gone nigh crazy wif de fing! Jes' to fink ob dat f'ishman dyin' like dat!"

Another appalling thought dawned upon Frank.

And Gerard! What of him?

The young explorer had not returned as he had promised. Had some dreadful catastrophe overtaken him?

Frank drew a deep breath.

"It begins to look as if you and I are to be the only survivors of this trip, Pomp," he said.

"Massy Lordy, Marse Frank!" cried the agonized darky, "don' know as we will either! Done fink dat we am all gwine to waste our libes in dis ere heathen country!"

"Oh, we won't believe that!" declared Frank rigidly. "I tell you the Boomerang is going through to the coast!"

The darkness was now most intense.

Frank kept the electric light turned upon the forest, so as to guard against an attack from that direction.

So the beach was shrouded in blackness. Pomp was on guard at the rear and trying to pierce the blackness in the direction of the lake when suddenly a white figure came over the rail.

The darky gave one yell and fled into the cabin.

"Massy Lordy!" he screamed, "de ghostess done come fo' me. Help, Marse Frank! doan' let dem come fo' dis chile!"

"Ghosts!" exclaimed Frank. "Nonsense, you black rascal. It is some of the foe."

But at that moment a piteous voice was heard from the cage door.

"Och hone, Mither Frank, let me in, quick, fer it's nigh dead I am!"

"Barney!" cried Frank, wildly, as he sprang to the cage door. There was the Celt stark naked.

"Fo' de Lor's sake," gasped Pomp, "whar yo' cum from?"

"Mither av Mary!" exploded the Celt, "phwere did you come from?"

"I done fo't de crocodile eated yo' all up!"

"Bejabbers I thought the same av yez! Phwere's me clothes?"

"I done fetch dem back here!"

"Yez murtherin' thrickster!" screamed Barney, "it's a dhirty job yez put up an me to take me clothes an' run home!"

"Golly, I didn't do dat, chile!" expostulated Pomp.

Frank had embraced the situation now and he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Well, you are a nice pair," he cried; "go off swimming and each think the other eat up by a crocodile! That is very brilliant!"

Barney slunk off in the cabin and put on his clothes. Pomp vanished in the direction of the galley.

Both felt cheap enough over the situation, and it was a sore subject with them for many a day.

The blacks did not venture an attack upon the Boomerang that night.

But this was not what worried Frank so exceedingly as another subject.

What was the fate of Gerard?

Frank now regretted that he had let the young explorer go off by himself.

He felt certain that some of the terrible perils of the wilderness had overtaken him and he was dead.

"I shall never forgive myself!" he muttered. "Poor Gerard! He was a noble young fellow!"

All that night Frank kept a lookout for the young explorer. But he did not return.

Morning came, smiling and bright. Nothing was seen of the natives.

They had apparently abandoned the attack and departed.

But of course there was no surety, but that they might return at any moment. So it was necessary to be constantly on guard.

Frank hastened the repairs on the machinery. He was determined to wait a reasonable length of time for Gerard's return.

Then if he did not come he should endeavor to find him.

He realized well enough the difficulty of such a move as this. But he still clung to hope.

The day wore away.

Still no sign of Gerard.

Night came on again.

The natives had not renewed their attack. Frank concluded that they were only a stray party of hunters and that they had permanently abandoned the attack.

"Begorra, I'm afther thinkin' Mither Gerard is in thrubble, sor!" ventured Barney.

"Yes!" agreed Frank. "I'm afraid he is, Barney. We must try and learn his fate to-morrow."

"Will we go in search av him thin, sor?"

"Yes, be in readiness!"

In the night while Pomp was on watch he suddenly came running into the cabin.

"Marse Frank!" he cried.

Frank was out of his birth instantly at the summons.

"Well?" he cried.

"Suah, Marse Frank, dar am a light way out on de lake. I done fo't I tole yo' obit."

Frank hastened on deck.

He saw as Pomp had, far out on the lake, a glimmering light. It looked like a torch.

How far away it was Frank could only guess.

"We'll soon see!" he exclaimed.

He pressed the key which lit the searchlight. He sent the brilliant pathway of light far out over the surface of the lake.

Then he saw an object dancing upon the waves of the great body of water. It was a little caracle.

It held a single occupant who suddenly stood up and waved his arms wildly.

All this was made plainly visible in the pathway of the searchlight. Frank held the rays upon this spot.

And he saw the occupant of the caracle paddle hastily toward the shore.

Nearer he drew slowly.

It was fully an hour before the light craft ran up on the beach.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" exclaimed Pomp; "who yo' s'pose it am?"

"It is Gerard?"

Frank felt confident of this. It proved really to be the lost explorer.

In a few moments he had climbed the bluffs and came aboard the Boomerang.

He was weak, and his shirt was drenched with blood.

"Mercy on us, Gerard!" cried Frank. "I had given you up."

"I don't wonder," replied the young explorer. "I have been through some terrible adventures."

"You are wounded?"

"Only a trifle. This blood is my enemy's. Give me a little wine and I'll be all right."

Pomp brought some wine, and it quickly restored the exhausted man. Then he told his story.

"I went far down the shore of the lake," he said, and found, as we supposed, that it is thick with islands. It is our best place to cross."

"But while making my way through some jungle I was suddenly set upon and made prisoner by some Ukonongos, natives who inhabit the islands and the east shore of the lake."

"They carried me away in a canoe to one of the islands. There I have been a prisoner ever since. But I succeeded in escaping, though I had a battle to the death with one of them. I found a small caracle upon the island shore and put out in it."

"They pursued me, and many times passed me in their canoes in the darkness, but I managed to outwit them."

"But after I was sure they were out of the way, and I was many miles from the islands, I lighted a torch which I found in the caracle."

"Then suddenly the search light streamed upon me, and I knew where the Boomerang was, and where to find my friends."

Frank fairly embraced him.

"I can't tell you how glad I am you're safely back!" he cried. "I had begun to think that our little party was all broken up."

"I hope we shall not get separated again!" said Gerard, "but in spite of my close call I learned many things of importance."

"That is good!"

"I know that it is comparatively easy to cross the lake by following the straits among the islands."

"We shall get across safely!"

"I am sure of it!"

"Marse Gerard," said Pomp, "am yo' a lily bit hungry?"

"I could eat an elephant," declared the young explorer.

Pomp hastened away to procure food for his friend, and Gerard did justice to the repast.

There was no more sleep that night for any of the party, and at an early hour the next morning the Boomerang was under way.

Down the shore of the lake for a dozen miles or more the travelers proceeded.

Then at a point opposite the islands the Boomerang was launched into the water.

The passage of the lake required all that day, but eventually the east shore was reached.

Here camp was made in a jungle, where all night long the distant roar of the lions, and the snapping cries of the hyenas made music.

"We are going into an elephant country now!" declared Gerard, "the Ukonongos are great dealers in ivory!"

"We shall also find the country thicker settled."

"Yes, and doubtless we will encounter Arab traders. This will be almost entirely a different country for us to explore."

"And every day draws us nearer to our journey's end," said Frank. "Truly there are few who can say that they have traversed the Continent of Africa from coast to coast."

"That is very true, and on wheels as well."

But though the explorers were nearing their journey's end, their list of adventures was not yet completed.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A TRAP.

THE next morning, at an early hour, the Boomerang was on its course through the Ukonongo country.

It was necessary to proceed slowly, as the country was cut up with roaring rivers, swampy tracts, and dense jungles.

These latter were the literal paradise of savage beasts.

Their roar and pather made the nights hideous. Many times they even ventured to attack the Boomerang.

But always to their sorrow.

Indeed, the travelers had acquired quite a collection of lions skins. They had learned to relish the sport.

Tall giraffes and striped zebras lived in these wilds, and also the elephant.

Once the Boomerang came upon a small mountain of ivory tusks, worth many thousands of dollars, on the coast.

But they had no way to transport the white treasure, so they were compelled to pass it by.

The Ukonongos dwelt in little thatched huts, and in the main were disposed to be friendly.

But there were some of them who were ready to annihilate the invaders upon their lands if the chance were given them.

Day after day the Boomerang toiled on in the heat of the tropics.

There were intervals when fifty or more miles of level plain enabled the travelers to travel at a rapid gait.

But as a general thing the machine picked its way with the greatest of difficulty over the roughest of ground.

And thus they passed into the Mukalala country, and were now nearing Zanzibar very rapidly.

So successful had they been thus far, that for a time vigilance became a trifle lax, and this nearly brought disaster upon them.

One day they came upon a walled town, quite an unusual thing in Africa.

But this was in a particularly rocky country, and the natives were quite far advanced in the notions of civilization.

Many of them were even armed with muskets, which they had procured from traders. Yet they were exceedingly inhospitable and inclined to be enemies to the white travelers.

Frank found this out at once and kept clear of the place until it came time to camp.

The spot selected for the camp was at the entrance to a deep defile and distant some ten miles from the Mukalala town.

Several times during the day Gerard had said with conviction:

"Do you know I believe those devils are following us!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Frank. "Why should they do that?"

"Why should they not? In my opinion they're a bad lot. I'll wager we'll have trouble with them yet."

"I hope not," said Frank. "However, as a precaution we will run further into the defile, where we could easily prevent their surrounding us and hold them all at bay."

So the machine was run far up into the defile, and then camp was made.

Darkness shut down, and none of the Mukalalas showed themselves. Frank regarded Gerard's alarm as groundless, and morning came without any development.

But the breaking of day showed a startling state of affairs.

The Mukalalas had not been idle during the night. Both ends of the defile were literally walled up.

The natives had taken this method to entrap the travelers, as they believed.

For a moment all on board the Boomerang were too astonished to speak.

Huge boulders were piled up to a height of twenty feet. How this had been done so noiselessly was a mystery.

But it had been done, and the machine was hemmed in, being literally in a trap.

It was the most striking incident of the whole journey, and for a few moments disconcerted the party.

Then Frank laughed.

"Begorra," cried Barney, "the devils think they have got us for sure."

"Golly, I don't see but dey have!" asseverated Pomp.

"Pshaw!" said Frank, contemptuously. "Do they really think they can hold the Boomerang in such a way? Why, I can blow my way through that barrier with ease!"

Then a warning cry came from Gerard, whose attention had been attracted by a sound far up on the wall of the defile.

At the same moment a distant yell was heard, and a shower of arrows came rattling down upon the deck.

Frank saw the peril at once.

The black foe had selected a position from which they could annihilate the Boomerang, if they wished, by rolling down stone upon it.

Even now a number of them were seen rolling a huge boulder to the edge of the cliff.

It was a moment of peril.

"Great heavens," cried Gerard, "they will crush us, Frank!"

The young inventor acted without delay or hesitation.

He saw that their salvation depended wholly upon this; he turned the electric gun full upon the obstructions in the defile.

"Shoot those fellows on the cliff!" he cried. "Pick them off as fast as you can!"

The order was obeyed.

Barney and Pomp with their rifles opened fire upon the foe above. For a time they drove them back from the brow of the wall.

And during this time Frank was pouring dynamite into the rock walls and reducing them to powder.

In a very short while he had literally blown his way through the obstruction and the machine was able to go forward.

Up the defile it ran.

The thunder of the dynamite and its terrible execution had terrified the natives beyond all description; they had fled incontinently.

Frank laughed.

"I don't believe they will want to attack the Boomerang again right away," he declared.

The machine soon had threaded its way through the hills and a long, level plain burst to view just beyond.

Across this the Boomerang made rapid time.

When nightfall came they reached a cultivated tract. A little settlement had sprung into existence upon a tributary of the Rucha river.

As the machine dashed into the main street of the little frontier town a great throng of men pressed out of the thatched dwellings.

"They were Germans as our travelers saw at once."

Gerard was a good German scholar and he at once hailed one of the men.

"What town is this?" he asked in that language.

"This is Ehrenberg!" was the reply. "Are you from the Faderland?"

"No; we are Americans!"

"Americans? Welcome! stop and have some beer!"

Gerard turned to Frank.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of that invitation?"

"Let us accept it!" replied the young inventor, readily. "Good German beer is not to be despised in this out of the way part of the world."

Barney and Pomp were delighted. So Frank stopped the Boomerang.

The German settlers were, indeed, friendly. The travelers were made welcome, and treated to beer and saurkraut as well.

"How far are we from Zanzibar?" asked Frank.

"About one hundred miles," was the reply.

"Hurrah!" cried Gerard. "We are near the end of our journey, Frank. And what a success it has been!"

That night was passed very pleasantly at Ehrenberg.

The next morning the Boomerang was early on the road. For roads of a primitive sort were now met with.

The land was fertile, and large plantations were to be seen upon every hand.

Mile after mile the Boomerang progressed on its way toward the sea.

Little towns were numerous and habitations were seldom out of sight.

"The progress in settling Africa is something wonderful," declared Gerard. "It is already a rival of America. It is my opinion that it will one day become a great republic just the same."

"Only after bloody wars," said Frank. "The effete monarchies of Europe will hold onto their possessions here as long as they can."

"Without doubt. But you will see the whole face of Europe transformed in fifty years, or at least our descendants will."

"You are quite a prophet."

"I don't think it requires a prophet to see that."

The land now began to grow low and marshy as they approached the sea. But the roads were broad and smooth, and the Boomerang had no trouble in booming along all right.

Everybody now was on the qui vive to see the Indian Ocean first. The Boomerang made good time, but it was late that day when Barney in the pilot-house first caught sight of the sea line.

He gave a loud cry.

"Begorra, there it is, Mither Frank! We've come to it at last!"

Words cannot express the sensation experienced by the African travelers.

It was with quite a thrill that they realized that they had accomplished the great feat of crossing Continental Africa from coast to coast.

The little town of Zanzibar, half native, half Arab and half German was near at hand.

The Boomerang had reached the end of its journey after many thrilling episodes.

In one sense all were glad, yet it was with keen regret that they accepted the fact that the journey and its incidents were over.

There had been many times during the trip when danger had frowned so harshly upon them as to bring them nigh to repentance.

But the spice of adventure and the call for risk and daring had given a rich color to the whole enterprise which had made it enjoyable to the utmost degree.

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT CATASTROPHE—THE END.

THE appearance of the machine in Zanzibar created a great sensation.

The story of the travelers that they had crossed the continent from St. Paul de Loanda was hardly credited by some.

But the ship of Captain Porter lay in the harbor waiting to take them aboard, and this evidence was all sufficient.

Frank decided to rest a few days in Zanzibar before going on aboard the ship.

He was feted and dined by the Americans in the town, of whom there were not a few. Gerard found several friends among a party of explorers.

So that altogether the stay at Zanzibar was most pleasant.

When the day for departure came, Frank for the first time broached a new series of plans.

"We have had such success in this trip," he said, "that I am constrained to extend it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Gerard, eagerly, "to what extent may I ask?"

"I have a great desire to travel through Egypt and cross the Sahara!"

For a moment Gerard was too delighted to speak. Then recovering himself, he cried:

"That would be grand. How will you go from here?"

"Sail northward to the Gulf of Aden, and by means of the Straits of Babel Mandeb into the Red Sea. We would disembark at Suakin, and proceed directly into the wilderness, eventually coming out at Cape Jubu, a point opposite Teneriffe."

"But Captain Porter—"

"I have fixed it with him. He will proceed by the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean and thence down the coast to Jubu and wait for us there!"

Gerard felt like standing on his head.

"How grand!" he cried again, "this is really twice across Africa."

"Yes."

"I am crazy with joy!"

The Boomerang had been taken apart by Frank's workmen and placed aboard the ship.

Then anchor was raised and the Port of Zanzibar was bidden farewell to.

A few days later the equator was crossed going northward.

Thus far the sea had been like glass.

One of those dead calms peculiar to the Indian Ocean reigned. Captain Porter was not altogether easy about it.

"I have never seen a dead sea in these latitudes without a blow afterwards," he said.

"And a blow in the Indian Ocean means something," said Frank.

"You are right it does!"

"The Southern Star is a stanch vessel though and ought to be able to weather it."

"I have always thought so," said the captain, slowly.

Frank gave a start.

He regarded the captain critically.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Captain Porter shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing I hope," he replied. "Coming around Good Hope, though, I imagined we strained her timbers a little. It may be all imagination."

"Had not an examination ought to have been made at Zanzibar?"

"I did examine her as well as I could. If there is anything wrong it is far below the water line. But I may be in error. I only had a feeling that she had started some timbers."

The subject dropped here, and in the next forty-eight hours Frank had nearly forgotten it.

The vessel had made good time, and Cape Guardafui was sighted. They would soon be in the Gulf of Aden, where all fear of a tempest would be at an end.

But at the very last moment came the catastrophe.

Suddenly the pilot of the steamer called a deck hand, and sent him hastily down for Captain Porter.

A distant line of yellow was springing up from the horizon. The calm sea had a long and peculiar roll, and a dull moaning sound was in the air.

Captain Porter came on deck in a hurry.

He gave a look at the distant horizon and turned deadly pale. Frank stood near and asked him:

"Well, captain, is anything wrong?"

"The typhoon!" he gasped, pointing to the horizon.

Then he gazed at the distant coast.

"If we could only make the Straits we would be all right," he said.

"Crowd on all steam!"

This order was obeyed. The engines of the Southern Star were forced to their utmost capacity.

But there seemed a power in the rolling sea which held them back. The Straits were an eternal distance away.

Suddenly a white line, mountain high, came rushing across the sea.

"Turn her head on to meet it!" cried Captain Porter as he sprang to the helm.

What followed seemed ever after like a weird, unnatural dream.

Great seas washed over the ship, there was one supreme awful moment, then a terrific crash.

The rudder chains broke, and she was thrown for a moment in the trough of the sea.

Why she did not go down then was a wonder.

But she did not, and in some way or other ran before the gale with terrible speed.

But water came surging up from her hold. Captain Porter came crawling down into the cabin with white, drawn face.

"We are lost!" he cried. "The ship is leaking, and is sure to go down. Say your prayers all!"

"Heavens!" gasped Gerard; "is this to be the end of our journey, Frank?"

The young inventor gripped the captain's arm and queried:

"Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing!" declared Captain Porter, despairingly. "We can only die!"

"Where are we headed now?"

"Straight for the coast, and certain to strike if we don't sink first."

Frank was about to creep up the companionway, when a great wave swept over the vessel and dashed him back.

The water was knee deep in the cabin of the Southern Star.

But that wave was the last stroke of the storm.

It vanished as quickly as it had come, and left the same calm sea behind it.

The Southern Star drifted a wreck upon the waters of a little bay. The shore was not a mile distant.

At once, overjoyed with the prospect of at least escaping with their lives, the voyagers rushed on deck.

"Get out the boats!" cried Captain Porter, "there is barely time. She is going down!"

"Mercy on us!" cried Gerard, "how will we get the Boomerang off?"

"We will never be able to do that," said Frank.

"Never? then she is lost!"

"Yes."

Gerard gave a dismal groan.

"And our trip across Egypt is out of the question?"

"It is a cold fact!"

"I won't have it so!"

But the ship was settling so fast that there was no time for the considering of plans.

Self preservation is the first law of Nature, and so the crew and passengers of the Southern Star proceeded to crowd into the boats.

They had got barely one hundred yards from the wreck when it went down.

And with it went the famous Boomerang to a perpetual ocean grave. For it was never to be resurrected.

The crew of the ill-fated steamer reached a little port which was called Abaramba, and which was a British possession.

Here the English commandant received them kindly, and said.

"There is a small steamer runs from here to Babel Mandeb once a week. There you may strike a Mediterranean steamer and so get back to Europe!"

"Well," soliloquized Captain Porter, dismally, "this is a serious trip for me. I have lost my steamer!"

"And I have lost the Boomerang," said Frank.

"Don't say that!" cried Gerard, hopefully. "At least not until we have tried to raise it."

"That is impossible," said Frank.

"Why?"

"They have no appliances in this port."

"Don't need any. If it is not too deeply sunk I will engage to recover the machine!" said Gerard.

So earnest was the young explorer about this that he at once hired a fishing smack and went out to make soundings.

But he returned with a most lugubrious report.

"She is at a frightful depth" he declared. "Confound the luck. The scheme is lost!"

"Never mind!" said Frank, encouragingly. "I can construct a better machine sometime and we can try a trip through Egypt at another time!"

"Will you do it?" cried Gerard, eagerly.

Frank laughed.

"I will see how I feel when we get back home!" he said. "We are a good ways from there, you know!"

"You are right!" said Captain Porter, "make no plans until you get home!"

As the British commandant had said a little steamer sailed that week for Babel Mandeb and took the castaways thither.

There they soon procured a steamer for Palermo and thence they proceeded to Paris.

Here Frank and Gerard, with Barney and Pomp, remained a few weeks to see the sights.

Captain Porter and his crew went on home by the first steamer from Havre.

"At least, I shall get my insurance," said the captain. "The Star was an old vessel, and had seen her best days. I can build another with the insurance money."

"Hear that," said Gerard afterward, in indignation. "He admitted that the Star was not a safe vessel to go upon such a long cruise with."

"I heard it," said Frank.

"I would sue him for the value of the Boomerang."

Frank laughed heartily.

"You feel worse about the loss of the machine than I do," he cried.

"I believe I do!"

"Never mind," I have something new on my mind which you will agree is far better than the Boomerang."

"What is it?"

Frank put a finger in his eye.

"That is telling!" he laughed. "Only keep your eyes open and your ears ready and you will learn in due course of time."

Gerard sighed, and went out to purchase tickets for the Theater Francais.

But all the way he kept muttering:

"Maybe he will, but just the same there's no time like the present, and I would give all my old shoes to be on board the Boomerang now, and traveling over the Sahara."

There are many disappointments in this changeable life, and Gerard was only suffering in common with mankind at large.

The explorer sailed a month later from Liverpool, and reached New York, safe and sound, in due time.

Frank, with Barney and Pomp, went direct to Readestown.

Gerard decided to abide in New York awhile to confer with his publishers about a new book upon the trip "From Coast to Coast."

Barney and Pomp soon fell back into the routine of their duties at Readestown.

Frank was for many days closeted with his secret plans, and the rumor went abroad that he was busily at work upon a new invention.

One day a letter came to the works. Frank read it with a hearty laugh.

Thus it read:

"DEAR FRANK—I have it from an authentic source that you have completed a new machine and are about to start for Egypt. Now I shall be bitterly disappointed if you forget to invite me to accompany you. Assure me that you will let me know if you decide to go."

"Yours anxiously,

"GERARD BENTON."

Frank sent back a telegram.

"DEAR GERARD—I will positively let you know when I start for Egypt. Until such time let our African adventures with the Boomerang remain your consolation."

"I am, your faithful friend,

"FRANK READE, JR."

And Gerard still waits. Whether his dreams will gain fulfillment or not only the future can tell.

[THE END.]

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